

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 5661

PERSONAL FOR AMBASSADOR SMITH FROM AMBASSADOR ALSTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, PFOR, AS
SUBJECT: MEETING BETWEEN AMBASSADOR GERARD SMITH AND AUSTRALIAN
JUSTICE RUSSELL FOX

REF: STATE 182136

1. I GATHER FROM REFTEL THAT YOU MAY BE MEETING WITH
JUSTICE RUSSELL FOX (CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE AUSTRALIAN CAPI-
TAL TERRITORY SUPREME COURT) SOMETIME AROUND AUGUST 26.
I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL FOR YOU TO HAVE A FEW COM-
MENTS ON FOX AND THE ROW THAT HAS BEEN STIRRED UP IN AUSTRALIA
OVER URANIUM.

2. BRIEFLY, ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO PUBLIC DEBATE ON WHAT
TO DO ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S ENORMOUS URANIUM RESOURCES BEGAN
TO REACH A LEVEL WHERE REVIEW AND RECONSIDERATION SEEMED
ADVISABLE. THE LABOR PARTY, UNDER FORMER PRIME MINISTER
GOUGH WHITLAM, WAS IN POWER AT THE TIME; IT HAD CLASHED
WITH THE UNITED STATES ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES, NOTABLY
VIET NAM AND OUR FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIA. THE
TRANSNATIONAL COMPANIES EXPLOITING AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL
RESOURCES WERE RAPIDLY BECOMING AN ISSUE (FOREIGN-OWNED
TRANSNATIONALS--PRINCIPALLY JAPANESE, BRITISH AND AMERICAN--
ARE AMONG THOSE MOST EAGER TO GET ON WITH MINING AND EX-
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PORTING AUSTRALIA'S URANIUM). WHITLAM'S GOVERNMENT
DECIDED TO ESTABLISH "AN IMPARTIAL COMMITTEE" TO EXAMINE
THE RESOURCES, THE PROBLEMS ATTENDING THEIR DEVELOPMENT
AND EXPLOITATION, AND THE SIDE EFFECTS THEREFROM--INCLUDING
SPECIFICALLY SAFEGUARDS FOR WEAPONS-GRADE FISSILE MATERIAL
AND DISPOSAL OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE.

3. FOX AND HIS ASSOCIATES SPENT NEARLY TWO YEARS ON WHAT IS KNOWN HERE AS "THE RANGER REPORT," WHICH WAS FINALLY ISSUED AFTER WHITLAM HAD BEEN DISMISSED IN AN ACRIMONIOUS (AND UNRELATED) INTERNAL POLITICAL FRACAS AND THE PRESENT CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT UNDER PRIME MINISTER FRASER ASSUMED OFFICE. THE RANGER REPORT TURNED OUT TO BE A CAUTIOUS, RATHER EQUIVOCAL ANALYSIS WHICH DID NOT COME DOWN HARD ON EITHER SIDE OF THE "MIND-AND-EXPORT" OR "LEAVE-IT-IN-THE-GROUND" ARGUMENT. IT SIMPLY NOTED THAT THERE WAS A CONSIDERABLE DEMAND FOR URANIUM IN THE CONTEXT OF WORLD-WIDE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT CONSTRUCTION; THAT AUSTRALIA'S PRINCIPAL FRIENDS AND TRADING PARTNERS CONSTITUTED THE LOGICAL MARKET FOR THIS URANIUM; AND THAT WHILE THERE WERE SAFEGUARDS AND WASTE DISPOSAL PROBLEMS, THESE WERE NOT NECESSARILY INSUPERABLE ALTHOUGH THEY NEEDED A LOT OF ATTENTION.

4. PROPONENTS OF URANIUM DEVELOPMENT AND MINING NATURALLY SEIZED UPON THOSE ASPECTS OF THE RANGER REPORT WHICH SUPPORTED THEIR VIEWS, AND OPPONENTS GO AROUND WAVING THOSE SECTIONS LISTING THE PROBLEMS. FOX HAS REPEATEDLY BEEN ASKED WHAT HE REALLY MEANT IN THE REPORT, AND AN EFFORT WAS RECENTLY APPARENTLY MADE BY SOMEONE (UNIDENTIFIED) WITHIN PRIME MINISTER FRASER'S GOVERNMENT TO INTERPRET BOTH FOX'S REPORT AND MESSAGES FOX HAD SENT BACK TO CANBERRA DURING HIS CURRENT TRIP TO EUROPE AS INDICATING THAT FOX

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WOULD VIEW WITH FAVOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AUSTRALIA'S URANIUM RESOURCES. FOX, EMBARRASSED UPON BEING QUIZZED BY REPORTERS WHILE ON HIS TRIP TO EUROPE, HAS DENIED THAT INTERPRETATION. THIS LEAVES MATTERS MORE OR LESS WHERE THEY WRE "EX ANTE." THERE IS A SUBSTANTIAL SECTOR OF THE AUSTRALIAN POPULACE IN FAVOR OF MINING AND EXPORTING URANIUM, BUT THE GOA HAS YET TO OUTLINE ITS POLICY. SHOULD IT DECIDE IN FAVOR (WHICH WE BELIEVE IT WILL), IT IS CERTAIN TO ENCOUNTER VIGOROUS OPPOSITION FROM THE DIVERSE BUT SUBSTANTIAL, AND HIGHLY ARTICULATE, MINORITY OPPOSED, INCLUDING SOME MILITANT UNIONS WHICH HAVE THREATENED TO BRING THE WHOLE PROCESS TO A HALT.

5. IN CLOSING, LET ME SIMPLY ADD THAT WHATEVER FOX SAYS WHEN HE RETURNS TO AUSTRALIA WILL BE VERY CAREFULLY AND PUBLICLY WEIGHED, AND IS CERTAIN TO INFLUENCE THE EVENTUAL OUTCOME OF AUSTRALIA'S DEBATE. IF YOU DO SEE FOX, AND HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO LET US KNOW AFTERWARDS YOUR IMPRESSIONS, I WOULD BE VERY GRATEFUL. ALSTON

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